



## Response to Public Consultation on the Proposed New Digital 21 Strategy

The Vision of Internet Society Hong Kong (ISOC-HK) is “Internet is for Everyone”. By connecting the world, working with others, and advocating for equal access to the Internet, we strive to make the world a better place. We would like to take this opportunity to respond to the public consultation on the proposed new Digital 21 Strategy by the HKSAR Government.

### 1. Support Open and Free Internet

- a. The Internet didn't just happen and it doesn't just happen, because it is the collaboration of a huge community of different participants, of operators, researchers, developers, businesses, governments and policymakers all around the world to build the Internet as it is now, open and free. Everyone can play a role to make the Internet stable, secure, open, free, dynamic and to keep it growing healthily. We believe very firmly in the multi-stakeholder model to Internet governance, where all of those different people who are involved with building the Internet really are participating together. There is no one single decision maker and it is a bottom-up approach.
- b. We have seen the Internet under threat politically with some governments and organizations trying to control the Internet and monitor the content on the Internet. At the World Conference on Information Technology 2012 we got an alarm call. We understand again the need for diversity of the experiences and the opinions of our region and of all parties in the multi-stakeholder process to be involved. All governments should not try to control and influence the Internet development in any ways or format that threaten the openness and freedom of the Internet as well as its development. An open and free Internet is a platform for incubation of creativity and innovation.
- c. The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) serves to bring people together from various stakeholder groups as equals, in discussions on public policy issues relating to the Internet. The IGF facilitates a common understanding of how to maximize Internet opportunities and address risks and challenges that arise. The HKSAR Government should participate



actively in the IGF annually.

## 2. Public Service – Free Digital ID and Open Data

- a. We welcome the proposal to provide free digital certificates to the public to promote the use of digital ID in government services. In order to make this effort effective, we need a longer period of promotion, we suggested the HKSAR Government to extend the digital certificate's validity period to three years. Otherwise the default certificate renewal period of one year will cause users just on board to drop out, before they get familiar to the use of the digital ID.
- b. We suggest the HKSAR Government setting up a unified set of guidelines regarding the assessment of security level of online services according to sensitivity of personal data and the required security measures for public access, for example, which are mandated to use digital certificate in authentication. This guideline should be followed by different HKSAR Government bureaux and departments.
- c. We support open data policy as manifested in Data.One, which is in the right direction. However, the available HKSAR Government public data sets are still very limited and the data format is not standardized. Opening more government data does not only increase the degree of transparency for better governance; but also creates business opportunities for the creative use of data especially by ICT Startups, SMBs and developers.

## 3. Internet Accessibility for All

- a. Web accessibility means that people with disabilities can use the Web. We welcome the HKSAR Government's initiative on Web Accessibility Recognition Scheme. However, besides the promotional efforts, more support, either in kind or in money terms, should be given to non-profit organizations, social enterprises, charity bodies that have limited resources.
- b. Every citizen in Hong Kong should have the right to enjoy efficient access to the Internet. They should not be discriminated. We suggest the HKSAR Government looking into the problem of broadband network service, which is unavailable in some remote areas in the



Territory.

#### 4. E-Learning for Under-privileged Families

- a. Internet access is an essential facility in education to allow children of different economical and societal background to learn and flourish. Access to education and Internet directly impact the development of an individual and the social mobility, and the removal of the cross generation poverty problem.
- b. Although we have a good IT infrastructure in general, we see a portion of the under-privileged family population having no Internet access at home. We applauded to the previous Government initiative “Internet Learning Support Programme” which sought to the root cause of this problem.
- c. We are however, very disappointed that the HKSAR Government ceased to support the Internet Learning Support Programme, or create new initiative to cater for the remaining 3% of underprivileged families. We believe that the HKSAR Government should target at achieving 100% of children in under-privileged families to have reasonable support to their learning process through ICT means and to lower the hurdle to upward social mobility. Discontinuation of the funding or similar effort contradicts OGCIO’s proclaimed vision of a ‘society to be more inclusive and knowledge-based’.
- d. We appreciate D21’s suggestion on playing a proactive role in promoting e-Learning and the provision of Wifi service to classrooms. However, having a good infrastructure does not imply the necessary e-Learning content as well the necessary knowledge and skills of the instructors/ teachers to make the best use of the facilities. We seek the HKSAR Government’s action in encouraging the development of elevating content and the promotion of equipping teachers with the necessary skills through training.

#### 5. Support ICT Startups and SMBs

- a. Hong Kong tops in many global competitiveness index in infrastructure, rule of law. But in many indexes Hong Kong is lagged behind in innovation. Innovation plays a critical role in the next generation development of the Internet. Supporting innovation and Internet



Startup is the foremost economical and education priorities of leading information economies.

- b. We concur to the general observation by participants in the ICT industry that suitable IT professionals such as programmers, project managers are hard to find. With less backing, startups find it particularly difficult to recruit talents, a critical element in starting an ICT business. This is an issue D21 should look into if it intends to support a thriving ICT industry.
- c. D21 admits that there is still a gap between demand and supply of local graduates from ICT programs. However, D21 fails to put forth concrete action plans on how to resolve this unfavorable situation. Its proposal on program co-designing, internship and recognition framework do not address directly to the issue of how to increase supply.
- d. We and most, if not all, Internet startup entrepreneurs believe that funding is the critical constraint in the building up of a young and thriving ICT industry. We do not believe that an online portal, showcase of products and permanent gallery, as D21 suggests, would suffice the support to ICT startups.
- e. To address the funding issue, D21 should observe the development and practice in countries like the USA where there are numerous channels for startups to solve their funding problem. Suggestions include make it easier for startups to raise seed funding via crowd-funding, dollar matching scheme for venture capital and angel investors to invest in early stage startups, and any other policies to increase incentives for individuals/institutional investors invest on early stage startups.
- f. Many ICT start-ups that we contacted opined that the application and reimbursement procedures for HKSAR Government funds or incubation program such as SERAP are unnecessarily complicated. OGCIO should play a pivotal role in coordinating with the concerned HKSAR Government bureaux and departments to resolve this problem like simplifying the process, using online submission platform and paying part of the subsidies upfront instead of on a reimbursement basis.
- g. We would also like to point out that in Hong Kong, ICT has an image problem. Students



and their family members do not regard IT or computer science highly as a field of study or career. This is an issue that the HKSAR Government should address to.

- h. The HKSAR Government should take the lead to use the local developed product / services during the procurement process. The HKSAR Government procurement should consider a policy in which for purchase amount below certain monetary value or under certain criteria, the competition be solely open to Startups/ SMBs to give a survival space where Startups/ SMBs do not need to compete head to head with big vendors. This can allow more Startups/ SMBs to participate in HKSAR Government project. In fact, the quality of many product/ services of Startups/ SMBs already got international recognition.
- i. To support Startups/ SMBs, we suggest that the HKSAR Government can issue Cloud Service Coupons to Hong Kong SMBs so as to encourage them to make use of the latest available cloud service. It can not only increase the efficiency of the operation of Startups/ SMBs, but also increase the ICT adoption rate of SMBs. For Startups/ SMBs, it also opens a new market for them.

If you have any query please contact Ms. Ping Wong, Secretary-General.

### **About Us**

Internet Society Hong Kong (ISOC-HK) is the local chapter of the Internet Society (ISOC), the global organization of Internet users and professionals, providing leadership in issues confronting the future of the Internet, including global coordination, development and cooperation of the Internet, technology standards, Internet governance and online civil society.

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Internet Society Hong Kong

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